

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510-1304

December 15, 2015

Most Holy Father Pope Francis,

Thank you for your recent visit to Washington and address to our Joint Session of Congress. Your visit and message had a profound impact on all of us.

I write to you about a matter involving Cardinal Nicolas de Jesus Lopez Rodriguez of the Archdiocese of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic and the United States Ambassador to that country, Wally Brewster.

Ambassador Brewster is from my state of Illinois and he is a personal friend. I supported President Obama's selection of Ambassador Brewster and he was sworn into his position in my Senate office. Ambassador Brewster is gay and was married under the laws of the United States to his partner, Bob Satawake.

Even before Ambassador Brewster's arrival in Santo Domingo in 2013, Cardinal Rodriguez launched a personal attack against him with public statements quoted in the popular press. The Cardinal used the hateful slur "faggot," which he continues to use to this day. In a recent interview Cardinal Rodriguez again described the Ambassador as a "faggot" and falsely claimed the Ambassador was setting out to promote "faggotry" in the Dominican Republic. The Cardinal described the Ambassador as a "wife" who "should stick to housework."

In the past the Cardinal and Dominican Church leaders even organized a "Black Monday" public protest against the Ambassador. Their action led to a counter-demonstration in support of the Ambassador and his partner.

Despite these hateful words and personal attacks, Ambassador Brewster has worked to quiet the conflict between Church leaders and himself. His patience and professionalism in light of these mean-spirited attacks by the Cardinal demonstrate his personal commitment to his responsibility of representing the United States of America.

The Church's teachings on gay marriage are well known but the Church also teaches us to show tolerance for those with different sexual orientations. The intolerant public statements of Cardinal Rodriguez are inconsistent with that clearly stated value.

Since your selection as Pope, you have shared a message of compassion, tolerance, and love. I remember distinctly when you spoke to us at the joint session of Congress in September and reminded us of our responsibility to “defend and preserve the dignity of your fellow citizens in the tireless and demanding pursuit of the common good.”

I accept that challenge and I am calling on you to ask nothing less of the hierarchy of the Church.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rich Durbin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator